



AETC Bases News Clips

Vance AFB OK



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VDA member satisfied with BRAC closure criteria

2/13/04

Staff and wire reports

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon on Thursday published final criteria for closing military bases identical to an earlier version, leading congressional Democrats to complain local officials' suggestions were ignored.

The criteria give priority to "military value," including operational readiness and condition of facilities. Secondary consideration goes to the impact on local communities and the environment.

"What I'm disappointed in is that the final criteria is exactly what the proposed criteria was," Rep. Sam Farr, told Defense Department officials at a hearing of the House Appropriations subcommittee on military construction.

"The criteria are so broad they could suit any DOD desired outcome," said Farr. D-Calif.

Mike Cooper, a member of Vance Development Authority and co-chairman of the Governor's Base Closure Task Force, said the fact there were no big changes in the criteria works to the advantage of Enid officials trying to preserve Vance Air Force Base.

"It kind of makes us feel good," Cooper said. "It would have been hard on communities if you suddenly changed the criteria or added new criteria."

Efforts to preserve Vance have focused on enhancing the base's military value, Cooper said.

"We didn't have a problem with any of the criteria," he said. "From our aspect, it's good to know there were not any hard, drastic changes.

"We have a plan. We are sticking to it."

California's senators, 50 of its House members and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger wrote letters suggesting changes to the criteria. None was included.

Similar letters came from officials around the country as states, including Oklahoma, try to protect their bases in the next round of closures, set for 2005.

Oklahoma's other military installations are Tinker Air Force Base in the Oklahoma City area; Fort Sill Army post in Lawton; McAlester Army Ammunition Plant; and Altus Air Force Base.

Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Ga., questioned "the initial criteria being accepted in the end, as if there were no comments" and asked whether that indicated decisions on which bases to close "have already been made."

Raymond DuBois, deputy un-dersecretary of defense for installations and environment, denied that.

"There is no list. All installations are going to be evaluated equally and fairly," DuBois told the subcommittee.

He said defense officials carefully considered the more than 200 letters from lawmakers and others received after publication of the draft version in December.

Military officials have said there is no target number of bases to close. There are approximately 425 major military installations nationwide. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said he believes the military has about 20 percent to 25 percent excess capacity at its bases.

The eight criteria published Thursday, with priority going to the first four, are:

Current and future mission capabilities and impact on operational readiness.

Availability and condition of land, facilities and airspace.

Enid News & Eagle

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Ability to accommodate contingency, mobilization and future force requirements.

Cost of operations and the manpower implications.

Potential costs and savings from closing the base.

Economic impact on nearby communities.

Ability of existing and potential receiving communities to support forces and missions.

Environmental impact.

Congress has until March 15 to reject the criteria; otherwise they take effect. The defense secretary must recommend bases to be closed in May 2005. A base closure commission and the president must approve the recommendations.

In four earlier rounds of base closures, from 1988 to 1995, 387 major and minor bases were closed or realigned, saving about \$17 billion through 2001 and \$7 billion per year after that, DuBois said.



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Sheppard AFB, TX



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SAFB investigation to begin Monday

Officials will work with First Step in probe

By Tara CoppScripps Howard News Service
February 14, 2004

WASHINGTON - The Air Command that oversees Sheppard Air Force Base will send a team of 15 investigators to Wichita Falls to look into allegations of sexual assault that surfaced this week.

Air Education and Training Commander Gen. Don Cook made the decision to send the group, which will include representatives from AETC's logistical, operations, medical and judge advocate units.

The team will mostly concentrate on on-base activities, but will also work with First Step Inc., the sexual assault crisis center where allegations surfaced of more than two dozen rapes involving Sheppard students between June 2002 and June 2003.

"The Air Force abhors sexual assaults of any kind, and we have, and will continue to do everything we possibly can to prevent it," Cook said.

The group will arrive Feb. 16 and examine the sexual assault prevention programs in place at Sheppard to "assess the climate and examine the effectiveness of all plans, programs policies and procedures in place at Sheppard to prevent sexual assault," AETC said in a release Friday.

The group will also look at what sort of actions are taken after an assault is reported, and will look into previously reported assaults to see how Sheppard handled them, Cook said.

"If - despite our best efforts - prevention fails, we must have a system that provides the basis for a swift and compassionate response to aid victims and punish perpetrators," Cook said.

The week-long stay is called a procedural review. The team will also hold focus groups with Sheppard students to talk about the effectiveness of sexual assault prevention and reporting programs on campus.

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Because First Step does not release the names of victims, it is unlikely the team will meet with any of the Sheppard students who have gone there for help, AETC spokesman Dave Smith said. However, if in the focus groups or during the week "folks identify themselves as victims, then we will immediately put them in the process to help them, aid them, take their statements and see where we need to go from there," Smith said.

The team is expected to stay in Wichita Falls through Feb. 21, but will stay longer if needed, he said.

Each Monday, when another 250 new students arrive at Sheppard, they begin a three-day introduction to the base, and part of that includes briefings on sexual assault, said spokesman Maj. Manning Brown.

Those briefings take place in the theater auditorium, where all of the students role-play different scenarios and are prompted to answer questions about sexual assault and violence in the workplace, said group discussion leader Capt. Carolyn Zablonksi, a Sheppard family advocacy officer.

"We role-play different scenarios with males and females, like 'this is a person who is threatening you or harassing you,' and getting them to decide what you say, who do you tell, what do you do in this situation," Zablonksi said.

The men and women go through the education together, and although most do not ask questions during the briefings, Zablonksi said, each time a handful do speak out, sometimes about past experiences, she said.

"Some of them actually recount personal experiences, or they'll talk about a friend that had something happen. Even the non-verbal communication we can pick up on."

The students are given information on places they can turn for help, including the clinic, chaplains, security forces and life skills, a mental health clinic.

Business cards with numbers for help are also distributed in the female restrooms, so if an attack occurs, a "student can access information for help in the privacy of a restroom stall," said Jeff Pixler, manager of family outreach.

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The sexual assault awareness training continues throughout their time at Sheppard, Pixler said. Each week finishes with groups of the students meeting with their trainers, and awareness is readdressed, he said.

The base did not make any changes to its sexual assault awareness education following the recent scandals at the Air Force Academy. It has always had a zero tolerance policy, Brown said. He could not comment on the recent reports of rapes at Sheppard, but said that "the safety and well being of the people at Sheppard is a priority

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S.A. team to look at Sheppard AFB

By Sig Christenson

San Antonio Express-News

Web Posted : 02/14/2004 12:00 AM

The Air Force said Friday a San Antonio-based investigative team will go to Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls to review reports of a rash of sexual assaults there over the past year and make recommendations for any necessary changes.

The team will interview commanders, instructors and students at the training base, and meet with staff at First Step Inc., a Wichita Falls rape crisis center that initially reported the incidents.

The group will spend next week at Sheppard with the goal of learning more about how base officials have managed the problem. The investigators also will review previous assaults to determine if proper actions were taken.

"The Air Force abhors sexual assaults of any kind. And we have, and will continue to do, everything we possibly can to prevent it," said Gen. Don Cook, head of the Air Education and Training Command at Randolph AFB.

Cook's decision was spurred by a Denver Post story that reported two dozen women at Sheppard had claimed to have been sexually assaulted by fellow airmen during the past year.

The newspaper said most of the women contacted First Step, rather than the Air Force, because they feared retaliation.

An Air Force official familiar with the case said the victims said they were assaulted at weekend off-base parties held at hotels in Wichita Falls.

The allegations are the latest in a series of reported instances of sexual misconduct at military installations in the United States, Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan.

An investigation is under way into 56 reported sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy since 1993.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has ordered a probe after dozens of women claimed to have been victimized by sexual misconduct while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Noting those ongoing investigations, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, this week asked for a Defense Department Inspector General's probe into the allegations at Sheppard.

In a letter Wednesday to Air Force Secretary James Roche, Hutchison said, "The situation at Sheppard could rival that of the Air Force Academy." Hutchison also said "the number of incidents and the duration over which they occurred are unacceptable."

San Antonio Express News

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Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, discussed the matter with Cook on the same day Hutchison sent her letter.

Cornyn serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee and supports calls for it to conduct hearings on sexual assaults at Sheppard and elsewhere, said his spokesman, Don Stewart.

AETC spokesman Dave Smith said the command doesn't know how many women have been victimized at Sheppard or how long the problem has existed.

First Step did not return repeated phone calls. But Monna Kline, First Step's interim executive director, told the Associated Press that the center doesn't report any rape to the base without the victim's permission, and that many have not wanted the Air Force to know of the incidents. It has provided statistics to the base.

The 15-member sexual assault task force, to be led by a female colonel who is awaiting promotion to brigadier general, will assess the climate at Sheppard.

It also will examine the effectiveness of its programs, policies and procedures, and ensure that the base has established a dialogue with First Step.

Cook said if the Air Force's prevention programs can't stop the problem, "we must have a system that provides the basis for a swift and compassionate response to aid victims and punish perpetrators."

The latest allegations, coupled with a string of scandals over the years, hint at a larger problem within the increasingly gender-integrated military, said Michael O'Hanlon, a Brookings Institution expert on the armed forces.

He suspects the very culture of the armed forces is part of the reason for continued reports of sexual misconduct.

"I'm not trying to say there is this problem. I'm saying I'm worried there might be," O'Hanlon said.

He added that anecdotal accounts suggest that perpetrators "seem to be able to retreat behind the institution in one way or another."

"And I admit if I were in command at one of these places, it would be an awfully hard problem to solve."



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Mag focuses on military history

By David Uhler

San Antonio Express-News

Web Posted : 02/15/2004 12:00 AM

With a name like Armchair General, a new magazine that showcases military history would seem to have a ready-made audience in San Antonio with its thousands of active duty, reserve, retired and veteran military personnel.

But can Armchair General pass inspection from a real general? Or will it get busted back to buck private?

William McBride, a retired four-star general and a former vice chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force, gives Armchair General a mixed review.

The 81-year-old McBride, who lives in San Antonio, says the magazine has "some good subjects and articles," but the stories lack footnotes and much of the other attribution that he's used to seeing in more scholarly military history journals.

On the other hand, from the perspective of a man who served as the lead navigator for a 54-plane formation of B-26 bombers on D-Day during World War II, the colorful charts and maps in the graphics-intensive magazine may make it worth its \$5.95 cover price.

"These charts and maps are a big, big plus," McBride says, pointing to the graphics related to an Armchair General piece on Normandy titled, "Walk Where They Fought." The article offers a suggested walking route and points out Allied and German positions and key sites in the historic battle.

"Nobody does this," McBride says. "Even in some of the best books written, you can't find an appropriate chart to see what the hell they're talking about."

Armchair General, a bimonthly publication that hit newsstands Feb. 3 following a 105,000-copy press run, is the brainchild of Eric Weider, the nephew of legendary bodybuilder and fitness magazine publisher Joe Weider.

Eric Weider worked in the family's fitness publication business for 15 years until its sale to American Media in January 2003. The family retains a minority interest, but Weider was ready for a new challenge. He decided to transform his lifelong interest in history into a magazine that "people can relate to."

"History is usually presented as very passive names, dates and places," the 40-year-old publisher says. "People forget that history is about people and people are interested in people."

"The best-selling magazine in the world is People. I guarantee you George Patton is a much more interesting person than Brad Pitt in terms of a fantastic story about what one person went through."

Patton's picture takes up most of the cover of the premiere issue of Armchair General. Inside, the magazine's lengthy profile of the World War II commander asks whether Patton was the "Best General of

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All Time?" Readers can go to the magazine's Web site at www.armchairgeneral.com and log into a user's forum to discuss the "best general" question and other topics.

Weider says the Web site and the magazine's mandate to tell stories that are "historically credible, but also engaging and entertaining" will make Armchair General different from more traditional military history magazines. The first issue, for instance, offers readers articles on video games and paintball, along with the chance to assume the role of commander in three separate simulations: a Sherman tank on Omaha Beach, a Panzer tank in Africa and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at Gettysburg.

Weider admits some of the authors who have written pieces for the magazine have had to adjust their styles to create the livelier — and somewhat historically looser — articles needed for the new magazine. Nevertheless, he thinks both real historians and casual readers (not to mention actual generals) will find something to like in Armchair General.

"Part of the perception problem about history, because it's usually presented in such an old-fashioned way, is that it's for old people, retired guys in recliners," Weider says. "My gut told me that people who are interested in history, and military history specifically, probably develop that interest as a teenager."

Just to be sure, Weider backed up his hunch with a year's worth of product development and a survey by a research company before launching Armchair General.

"Potentially," Weider says, "my audience is as young as 16 and as old as anyone who can still read."



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Pentagon's base-closing timeline

February 13, 2004

Base closing timeline

- Monday: Final base selection criteria must be released by the Pentagon.
- February: Plan and infrastructure inventory due to Congress.
- March 15: Congress must approve/disapprove the selection criteria.
- April: Comptroller general evaluation of the plan.
- April 2004-February 2005: Revisions to the plan are made, must be submitted in time for the fiscal year 2006 budget.
- March 15, 2005: President must give the Senate his nominations for the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.
- May 16, 2005: Defense secretary makes recommendations on what bases to close or realign.
- July 1, 2005: Government Accounting Office reviews defense secretary's base closing recommendations.
- Sept. 8, 2005: Commission makes its recommendations for closing.
- Sept. 23, 2005: President must approve or disapprove commission's recommendations. If the president approves the recommendations, they will become law after 45 days unless Congress enacts a joint resolution to disapprove them.
- Oct. 20, 2005: If the president disapproves the recommendations, the commission has until this date to revise its recommendations.
- Nov. 7, 2005: President's approval or disapproval of the revised recommendations.
- April 15, 2006: Commission ends.

On the Net: Base Realignment and Closure site: www.defenselink.mil/brac

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Lackland airman's wife faces murder-for-hire rap

By Mary Moreno

San Antonio Express-News

Web Posted : 02/15/2004 12:00 AM

A 22-year-old woman was in jail Valentine's Day, accused of trying to hire someone to kill her estranged husband for insurance money.

Clairese Marie Sickles was charged with conspiracy to commit capital murder Friday. She was released Saturday afternoon after posting \$50,000 bond.

Sickles is accused of offering a police informant \$50,000 to make "her husband disappear," according to an arrest affidavit.

Her husband, Daniel M. Sickles, who turned 24 on Valentine's Day, is assigned to Lackland AFB and couldn't be reached for comment.

The informant initially contacted military investigators, saying a man had asked him to kill Daniel Sickles. The man, who hasn't been charged, reportedly told the informant that Clairese Sickles would pay them \$50,000 each from insurance money.

The informant said he would need to speak to the woman "to verify that she was agreeing to the murder of her husband," according to the affidavit.

Later that day, the informant had three phone conversations that were recorded by police. In the calls, a voice police identified as Clairese Sickles' tells the informant she didn't want her husband killed in front of their son, but that she didn't care if the killer used a gun or a knife, the affidavit states.

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LAUGHLIN AFB, TX



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Council approves LAFB water contract

KAREN GLEASON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

City council Tuesday night unanimously approved a contract setting the water rate for Laughlin Air Force Base at \$1.89 per 1,000 gallons, but not until several council members aired concerns about the length of the contract.

Councilman Robert Garza asked, "What was the rationale of obligating the city to (this rate) until 2008?"

City Manager Rafael Castillo Jr. said the contract could be renegotiated every July.

"This contract locks us in," Garza countered, and asked if the city "wouldn't feel more comfortable" with a contract ending in 2005 or 2006.

"2008 is what Laughlin asked for," Mayor Dora G. Alcalá said.

Garza then suggested the city submit a contract ending Sept. 30, 2005 "and see what their response is."

"I'm not comfortable with 2005 because of the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure Commission). They (the commission) are always looking at what a community offers a base," Alcalá said. She added that "in the event of a budget crunch" or similar emergency, she felt certain the city could approach the base and negotiate an increase in the rate.

"This is what they want, and I would want us to respond accordingly," Alcalá said.

The mayor said a state delegation working to keep Texas bases open through next year's feared round of possible base closures would be visiting Laughlin next week.

Interim City Attorney James Bayne Jr. told the council it was his understanding that the base has always been open to discussing rate increases that could be justified. "They're always willing to listen," Bayne said.

Bayne added that Laughlin in the late 1980s promised to pay its fair share of any improvements the city planned to make to its water system. "They've always been amicable to negotiations if we could show them why," Bayne said.

Garza then pointed out that the base until recently paid 10 cents per kgal for Del Rio water.

That rate was raised to \$1.46 per 1,000 gallons under Castillo.

Garza asked how long the

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Del Rio News Herald

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contract for the 10-cents-per-kgal water rate had been. "I don't think it was a long-term contract like this one," Bayne said.

"No one can dispute the importance Laughlin has; that's a given," Garza said. "The only thing is if something happens between now and 2008 that substantially affects the cost of water, we're shifting the burden of paying that to the rest of the users in the community."

Garza also pointed out that the base had originally asked the city to reserve five million gallons per day for Laughlin use when the city built its new water treatment plant, and that the city had then planned, designed and built the water treatment plant to accommodate the request.

Councilwoman Pat Cole added her concerns to Garza's. "It concerns me that we're passing a resolution for \$1.89 and at the same time we're saying we intend to go back and ask for more. If we pass this resolution, we need to be prepared to live with it unless something extremely unforeseen and major happens."

"Even if the unforeseen happens, we have no contractual right to go back, so we need to be able to answer the question why water rates are going up and this major user's rates are not going up," Garza said.

Alcalá said most communities would jump at the opportunity to have a military

installation nearby and repeated her belief that "if something happened," Laughlin could be counted on to help pay the cost.

Garza also wanted to know how much in anticipated revenues the city had to do without, since 2002-2003 estimated income to the city's water department had been tied to a Laughlin water rate of \$2.49 per kgal.

Castillo replied the city last year wrote off \$150,000 in projected revenue because of the change in water rates, a figure Garza multiplied by six to come up with a "loss" of

\$900,000 over the remainder of the life of the contract.

"That's way ahead of what we used to get," noted Councilman Rudy Chapa. "I think it's fair."

Cole said she believed that if council approved the Laughlin rate through 2008, but made public its intent to seek a higher rate later this year, "we're sending a mixed message."

Garza again mentioned the fact that the city had originally planned its new water treatment plant to accommodate Laughlin's request for five millions gallons per day.

City Engineer Alejandro Garcia noted although that had been the base's original request, they had later changed that requested reserve to two million gallons a day.

Councilman Claudio Sotelo said, "I think it's a small price to pay for the benefits we reap."

"I personally prefer, that if we approve the \$1.89, we not go back and ask for another penny until 2008," Cole said.

The council then unanimously approved the resolution authorizing the city manager to execute the contract.

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Defense Department releases base closing criteria

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Department of Defense has drafted its final criteria for recommending military installations for closure in 2005.

The criteria were to be published in the Federal Register on Thursday. Texas lawmakers who got an early peek said the criteria appear to be unchanged from draft criteria proposed by the Defense Department.

Don Stewart, a spokesman for Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, said the criteria are written broadly to ensure that if the process is fair, Texas should do well. Cornyn and Texas Gov. Rick Perry had not suggested any changes to the criteria.

Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Waco, said he would question a DOD official about the criteria in a Thursday hearing. He said Fort Hood would do well when evaluated under the criteria.

Texas has 17 major military installations with an economic benefit believed to be about \$43 billion a year. The sector employs

about 232,000 uniformed personnel and civilians, according to state officials.

The DOD informed Congress of the final criteria in a letter from Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz to Rep. Don Young, House Appropriations Committee chairman.

In the letter, the DOD said that in giving priority to military value of installations it will consider:

- Current and future missions capabilities and the impact of a closure on operational readiness for all military forces.
- availability and condition of land, facilities and associated airspace at existing and receiving locations, including training areas for use by the military for homeland defense training and other activities
- ability to accommodate contingency, mobilization and future total force requirements — costs

Under the heading "Other Conditions," the DOD listed timing of costs and savings,

See BRAC, P. 3A

economic impact to adjacent communities, ability of communities to accommodate forces and environmental impact.

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, and other Texas congressional members had asked for changes to the criteria.

Hutchison, who serves on the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on military construction, wanted 2005 Defense

Base Closure and Realignment Commission to study overseas installations and determine how eliminating U.S. bases would affect homeland security.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has said he believes the military has about 20 percent to 25 percent excess capacity at its bases.

A law passed by Congress in 2003

requires the Pentagon to give the base closing commission a list of bases recommended for closure by May 2005. The commission then picks the bases to close and Congress may approve or reject the entire list.

Congressional members often fight hard against closure of bases in their districts.



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Base, center entered agreement

Memorandum of understanding signed Jan. 21 by both agencies

Andre Coe

Times Record News

Just weeks before a *Denver Post* article depicted a "wave" of sexual assaults at Sheppard Air Force Base, a Wichita Falls crisis center had entered into agreement with the base to provide services to domestic abuse victims.

In a memorandum of understanding signed Jan. 21, First Step Inc. and the base agreed to inform their respective clients of services available through either entity.

The agreement was a proactive measure, not reactive, said First Step program director, Xotchiti Pruitt.

Sheppard's obligation was to provide domestic abuse victims with information about First Step, including telephone and hot line numbers and a general description of the shelter and services it provides. First Step agreed to do the same for Sheppard's services. Both organizations agreed to work with the other to cross-train staff members.

Pruitt said the memorandum of understanding is a common agreement between nonprofit agencies and other organizations with similar

services. First Step has similar agreements with Patsy's House, a local crises center for children who have been sexually abused, and Midwestern State University, she said.

"We had already discussed this because we needed a memorandum of understanding," Pruitt said. "It's just for everybody's benefit. We didn't want to drop the ball."

Maj. Manning C. Brown, director of communications for Sheppard, re-iterated Thursday that the Air Force has a zero tolerance policy towards sexual assault.

Brown referred to climate assessment reports as proof that victims at Sheppard feel comfortable reporting sexual assault crimes. The bi-annual climate assessment reports are used as commander's tools and were not made available.

"One assault is too many," Brown said. "That goes without saying."

Senate Armed Forces Committee hearings will begin in two weeks regarding sexual assault allegations by service members in Iraq and Kuwait.

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Official: Base takes safety seriously

Sheppard carries zero-tolerance policy on sexual assaults, harassment

Jessica Langdon
Times Record News

No student should leave Sheppard Air Force Base without knowing Sheppard's policies and feelings about sexual assault. That's the message spokesman Maj. Manning Brown stressed Thursday, adding that Brig. Gen. Arthur Rooney would tell any student the same thing in a heartbeat.

Students do get that message from Rooney himself. He briefs hundreds of students who are new to military service, and they hear it more than once.

"It needs to be reinforced," Brown said. "There's a zero-tolerance policy here."

He stressed that policy has been in place for a long time — and was not a result of a

Denver Post article that reported "a wave of sexual assaults" involving Sheppard.

"When students arrive here from day one, it is provided to them repeatedly what is appropriate behavior," Brown said.

He said they learn what sexual assault is, and the base makes sure students are aware of the resources that are available to them. Those resources include security forces, chaplains, life skills and a mental health clinic.

Cards with phone numbers for help are also offered in women's restrooms, so a "student can access information for help in the privacy of a restroom stall," family outreach manager Jeff Pixler said.

Briefings give male and female students a chance to role-play and learn what they

should do if they're threatened or harassed, Sheppard family officer Capt. Carolyn Zablonksi said.

Brown said Sheppard as a whole takes safety seriously and so do the people at the heart of the base.

"Gen. Rooney takes a very personal interest in the welfare and wellbeing of everyone who comes on base, particularly students," Brown said.

He said part of Sheppard's mission is to offer a place for wholesome activity, and the base has plenty of places designed with physical, spiritual and emotional health in mind.

One of those places is the Solid Rock Café, which opened its doors last year, taking the idea from a program to a place. Sheppard's chap-

lains run it, and it offers "casual environment for students and families to go and be themselves and hang out," Brown said. The actual building took the idea from a program to a real place, Brown said. He said there was a tremendous increase in use once the facility was dedicated.

Brown said Sheppard also offers places like gymnasiums and a bowling alley, designed for families.

"Just making sure the students have the time to wind down — but do it in a productive way"

Crime reporter Jessica Langdon can be reached at (940) 763-7530 or by email at langdon(at)TimesRecord-News.com.

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Ex-counselor takes issue with Post story

Grimsinger says quotes about Sheppard taken out of context

Inside ■ Sheppard takes personnel's safety seriously and maintains a zero-tolerance policy.
■ Sheppard and First Step Inc. entered a memorandum of understanding agreement

weeks before *Denver Post* story broke.

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■ Read the *Denver Post*'s story about sexual assaults at Sheppard Air Force Base at www.denverpost.com

Lee B. Weaver
Times Record News

A former Wichita Falls crisis counselor cited in a recent *Denver Post* article said Thursday her remarks were taken out of context in the story.

The article — which told of widespread sexual assaults at Sheppard Air Force Base in the past year going "largely unnoticed" — ran in Wednesday's edition of the *Post*. It included quotes by Laura Grimsinger, executive director of First Step Women's Shelter and Sexual Assault Counseling from 1987 to 2002.

Grimsinger, who now works in the Electra school system, was reached by phone in Austin where she was at-



Grimsinger

tending an educational conference. She expressed surprise upon hearing her quotes read back to her.

"Oh, they made that sound a lot more dramatic than I meant it to be," she said.

The *Post* story quoted Grimsinger as being critical of Sheppard's treatment of sexual assault victims and its reluctance to investigate sex crimes: "(Sheppard) wants to minimize sexual assault and not address it. They turn their backs on them (victims), and it's devastating. The training schools are the big problem. These women are way outside their home element and have little support."

Grimsinger confirmed part of the passage but not all of it.

"Part of it is accurate in that these are kids (at the

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Sheppard AFB, TX



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base), and they are out of their home element. This is the first opportunity to have this type of adult freedom," she said.

But Grimsinger took issue with how her quotes were used in the story, which focused on a rash of "more than two dozen" sexual assaults involving base personnel from June 2002 to June 2003.

"I was not involved with First Step during that period of time," she said. "I did not speak to anything that has happened since I left."

Grimsinger did acknowledge communication and education problems between Sheppard and First Step during her tenure.

"During my time there, we had very few interactions with Sheppard in reference to sexual assaults," she said. "Part of that is because First Step wasn't as aggressive about getting our message out as we could have been. And part of it is that the military culture doesn't really encourage that sort of thing."

Victims of sexual assault often refuse to press charges or even report the crime, Grimsinger said.

"One reason why Sheppard didn't (address sexual assaults) was because the victims did not want Sheppard to be involved," she said. "They

just want the violence to stop."

Over time, relations between First Step and Sheppard have strengthened to include more communication between the parties.

"Later, there were times when we were called on to come out and help and times when students were mandated to come in for counseling," she said.

Sometimes though, the base's best intentions were thwarted by insensitivity, she said.

"There was one instance that they were trying to get a (victim) to come in for counseling with us. But at the same time, they forced her to work in the same group on base as her attacker," Grimsinger said. "She eventually just dropped out."

Grimsinger said she knew of no instances of when the base intentionally shirked its duty to support assault victims or investigate sex crimes.

"I cannot tell you that I know of sexual assault cases that were covered up," she said.

But she isn't sure the public always sees the whole story.

"Do I think that cover-ups still took place? Sure I do. Do I know for a fact? No."

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